

The LURE of PERIL

Repulsing the Nicaraguan Army Single Handed

By Captain Fritz Duquesne.

Colonel "Gabe" Conrad was killed in action at Santa Clara Mountain whilst opposing the advance of the government troops. The news came from Managua, Nicaragua, via Galveston, Texas, and was signed by the Nicaraguan president, for the time, Dr. Madriz. It was this dispatch that was flashed by wireless, from ship to ship across the Gulf, until one of them could speak to land. The news spread through New Orleans, and on every hand it was, "did you hear the latest? Gabe's dead."

"Gabe Conrad dead? You don't mean it!"

"Read this, it's in all the morning papers, signed by the president of Nicaragua. Must be true."

"Poor Gabe, I am sorry. A prince of good fellows. I was only talking to him on this very spot a couple of months ago, and now he is dead. I'm very sorry."

"So am I. Nice boy, Gabe, and I bet he gave a good account of himself before he went down and out. He died with his boots on, you bet."

Up and down Canal street the news flew and Gabe Conrad, a young favorite of the town, the friend of everyone, was mourned as dead. A crowd of adventurous spirits gathered at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, the meeting place of revolutionists and filibusters, and drew up a message of condolence which was dispatched to Gabe's people.

Unfortunately for the president of Nicaragua, Colonel Gabe Conrad was not killed, notwithstanding that he should be was the dearest wish of that gentleman's heart, so dear to his heart, in fact, that he killed Conrad on paper once a month while the hostilities were in progress.

The nearest the government troops ever came to putting Gabe Conrad on a real death list was at the battle of Santa Clara Mountain, where he was shot plumb through the middle by a bullet from a Maxim machine gun. When Madriz heard this he jumped in the air with delight and cried, "Now we'll win. That dog's example was keeping the rebels in the field." Perhaps the "dog's" example was exaggerated by the excitable president, but there is no doubt about the "dog's" work in helping to chase Dr. Madriz and the rest of Zelaya's government out of Nicaragua, and Gabe Conrad, instead of being buried in a trench at the foot of Santa Clara Mountain, is down in the history of Nicaragua, as one of the republic's saviours with the title of general.

No, he was not declared a general at the caprice of a temporary president. He won his title on a blood-stained battlefield. The winning of that rank is a story of pluck and endurance unequalled in the turbulent history of the scrapping republics of Central America, and unsurpassed any where.

Colonel Gabriel Conrad was in command of General Estrada's artillery, and being the only man able to command artillery in Nicaragua, his services were in demand everywhere that the imminence of a battle was evident. It was Conrad's artillery here, and Conrad's artillery there. Before the guns were cool from one action they were in another. Every victory of the revolutionists was made decisive by the tell-tale effectiveness of the machine guns under the command of the young American. In fact, it was his work that prevented the vastly superior forces of General Zelaya from crushing the revolution at its inception. When Zelaya heard of the splendid work of the Americans in Estrada's army, he sent out special spies and scouts under all sorts of inducements to effect their assassination or capture.

One of the results of this method of sipping on the Americans in the revolutionary forces was the capture of Cannon and Groce, who were lured by a traitor into an ambush from which there was no escape. These two young men were shot by the orders of President Zelaya, whose act nearly caused the intervention of the United States, and went a great way towards keeping the American volunteers with the revolutionary forces, in the field to the bitter end, ultimately causing the complete defeat of the government's army.

Fortunately for Gabe Conrad, although he had many narrow escapes, he always succeeded in eluding capture in the many traps that were laid for him.

His big deed in the war was the holding back, practically single handed, all of the forces of President Madriz, which were pressing on the army of General Chamorro. The government troops were entrenched in a strong position at Garita, on a hill five miles from Santa Clara Mountain. They were six hundred strong, with artillery. On Tuesday afternoon orders came from General Chamorro by courier to General Luis Mena, saying, "Keep back the enemy's forces till I take up a position at Juigalpa. I shall cut off the enemy from a land route from Acayapo to Managua. Wait orders." This was a large order



At last in desperation Conrad seized a band of cartridges and putting it into the gun opened fire.

for a general whose men were outnumbered ten to one. General Mena called up his officers and told them what was expected. "Our artillery," said he, "is hopelessly outnumbered. There is only one gun here; the rest are with General Chamorro." Here Colonel "Gabe" Conrad spoke as the head of the revolutionary artillery:

"We'll look out for their guns, general. I'll do my part of the fighting if the others attend to theirs."

"All right," answered Mena, "go ahead and we'll show them what we can do." That night the revolutionists crept slowly and cautiously towards the government trenches. It was a terrible task for the officers, who in the complete darkness, and impeded by the dense and treacherous undergrowth, had to keep their men together, if they hoped to make a successful attack. All through the night, on their hands and knees, the attacking party advanced over the damp jungle mould. Half a mile from the enemy's position a sentry was discovered. An advance scout brought in the news. A halt was called and a whispered consultation between the officers took place. The situation was, if the revolutionists advanced any further they would alarm the pickets, if they did get advance they would be unable to surprise the enemy at daybreak. There was a deadlock.

At this juncture the man who always spoke last and little, Colonel Conrad, suggested that the best thing to do would be to overcome a couple of the outposts in silence, if possible, and then pass through the broken line in single file, so placing the line of pickets outside the attacking party.

The suggestion was adopted with some dissent on the part of one of the Nicaraguan officers, who was not at all pleased to have to acknowledge Colonel Conrad's suggestion as a possible solution of the problem. "As you have suggested a plan," said that officer, "who will carry it out?" "I'll try," said Conrad, "and if I don't succeed," he put his hand inside his shirt and pulled out a folded piece of paper, "this is the address of my relatives in the United States with instructions, if I should be killed." Then he turned to General Luis Mena: "General, I want you to give me two men whom I shall select to accompany me." The general consented and Colonel Conrad went over to a group of Nicaraguans and held a conversation in an undertone with them, after which he returned with two of their number to the officers.

"General," said Conrad to Mena, "one of these men shall return with the news of my success or death within three hours. They are both brave fellows, I know from observation, and they both know what to expect. They accompany me of their own free will." A moment later Conrad and his two companions disappeared in the darkness.

When Conrad and his men were within a quarter of a mile of the enemy's pickets, they talked over the plan of action, which was to be followed. One man was left behind to take back news of a possible failure. Conrad and Paulo then went off to feel for the pickets. For an hour they crept through the heavy foliage,

backward and forward, but to sign of the enemy's outposts, although they got to within two hundred yards of their trenches. It was decided that Paulo return to the revolutionists' camp as fast as possible and inform General Mena of the situation, whilst Conrad was to follow. Their way back to the man who was left behind was down a narrow ravine, which in the rainy season was a water course. Paulo went ahead and Conrad made his way at a normal pace.

Conrad had been traveling towards his camp and examining the country as well as he could in the half light from the stars for about half an hour when a voice struck his ear. He listened. Again the voice spoke. "It was a command in Spanish: 'If you move I'll shoot you dead.' Could Paulo be a captive, or had he taken a prisoner? What did it mean? If he did not reach the insurgent camp in rapid time there would be no attack in the morning and the movement would fail.

There was nothing for Conrad to do but his best to find out. As fast as he could, he made his way down the rocky water course, which here and there showed white sand under the light of the stars. As he advanced a sound of crushing gravel met his ear. He jumped behind a bush and listened. There were more pairs of feet than one making the noise. Slowly they came up the ravine and at last he could make out two figures, one behind the other. What was he to do now? Was one of the men Paulo or were they both enemies? Nearer they approached. There was a difference in the color of the blankets the men wore. That is, one was black and the other a lighter black. Paulo wore a blue blanket; the enemies' were red. If one man of the two was Paulo, it was the one with the blackest blanket. Conrad decided to take the risk, know-

ing that if the two men were enemies he would in all probability be killed.

On the men came silently. They rubbed against the bush that hid him. He had to act, and to act silently so as not to alarm the enemy. Every atom of strength in his being he commanded, and then, as the man in the lightest blanket brushed past the bush, like a tiger Conrad sprang upon him, gripping his throat in a grasp of iron. For a moment the man struggled and then fell unconscious on the ground. Conrad rose and looked on the other man whose hands were tied behind him.

"It's I, Paulo," he said. Conrad untied his hands and put the rope around the hands of the man on the ground, who was showing signs of life.

"How did he capture you?" asked Conrad.

"Almost the same as you captured him. He waited behind a bush and covered me with a gun. We are now inside the enemy's pickets; we passed through them unawares."

"Is there anyone guarding the ravine now?"

"No, Colonel, the man on the ground was the only one, I think."

"Well," said Conrad, "take this. If he moves you know what to do. I shall return to you soon." Conrad, knowing the ravine was not guarded, made his way as fast as possible to his own lines. A quick conference with General Luis Mena, and in ten minutes the column was making its way towards the ravine behind him.

In Indian file the revolutionists trailed through the bush, passed down the ravine, and were soon inside the pickets of the government troops. Long before sunrise the revolutionists were stretched out in a thin line in front of the enemy's trenches. Colonel Conrad's single machine gun held a good position, and every man had his weapon ready for instant use. Around Conrad's gun were Gordon's sharpshooters, mostly boys from New Orleans, who, with their autoloading rifles and Luger pistols, were to keep off any charge that might be made on the solitary piece of artillery.

The government troops thinking themselves secure behind their line of pickets, their strong intrenchments, and in their vastly superior numbers had taken few precautions immediately around their camps against attack. Slowly the hours dragged on whilst the eager revolutionists waited with their fingers on the triggers of their Remington autoloading

At last the East grew green, and as the light crept over the earth it revealed the government camps slowly waking from its slumber. Conrad got his range and put a band of cartridges in his machine gun. Every man was ready. General Mena gave the signal, and with thousands of flashes from the Remingtons, and the frightful roar of Conrad's machine gun, the battle was opened. An uproar rose in the enemy's camp, and men darted here and there, in frantic fear of death like mad ants.

Although their numbers fell fast they were not to be easily beaten, and under the rallying voices of their officers they took cover and answered their foes with cool and soldierly shooting. The execution done by Conrad's artillery was so terrible, and so demoralizing, that the government troops brought their guns to bear on him to silence his fire.

Shifting his piece to a new position, Conrad continued his splendid work, until he was again located by the enemy. Charge and counter charge were made. The government troops would rush the insurgents, who in turn would charge back on their enemies, stabbing, shooting, hacking, like demons, in the coarse undergrowth. Men with battle frenzy cried, "Viva Estrada! Viva Chamorro!" as they fell with mortal wounds.

All day the fight went on in bloody ferocity, neither side making any gains, but piling up dead by the dozens. Conrad kept the enemy's guns engaged, and as fast as his own men were shot down he broke in new ones to serve his gun. At last darkness obliged the troops to cease shooting. The dead were spread in hundreds on the battlefield. The generals on each side sent messengers with flags of truce to demand the other's surrender, and each told the other to go to what would be "hell" in plain English. A truce, however, was arranged to dispose of the dead, whose bodies were gathered in heaps, often the dead of both sides in one heap, and crude oil was poured over them, a match was applied, and the funeral pyres lit up the battlefield.

Morning saw the continuation of the battle, which lasted throughout the day. The insurgents drove the government troops from their trenches at the bayonet's point. Under an urgent appeal the government hurriedly sent heavy reinforcements with four pieces of artillery, which in turn drove the insurgents back with heavy losses, so heavy that a retreat was earnestly considered by the revolutionists.

At this point General Bladon with

reinforcements and artillery from General Chamorro's column dashed into the fight. Blandon and Mena were driven back by the enemy's superior forces and artillery. The service of Colonel Conrad's gun was again annihilated. All along the line the revolutionists were losing heavily but holding their own. Another service was found for Conrad's gun, which was in an exposed position, and could not be removed on account of the accuracy of the government men's fire. These brave fellows tried to rescue the piece, but they met their death in the attempt. At last, Conrad in desperation seized a band of cartridges and putting it into the gun opened fire. Bullets rained around him and men fell on all sides. General Blandon seeing Conrad's plight went to his aid. A moment later he was mortally wounded.

The officers were falling in all directions, and as night was coming on General Mena decided to retire before his troops were demoralized. The Americans under Conrad and Gordon assumed the responsibility for the rear guard. It was in this action that Gabriel Conrad won such distinction that he was created a general. He also has the honor of being the youngest man of his rank in the world.

As soon as the government troops saw the revolutionists retreating, they executed a clever move and practically cornered their enemy. General Mena was in despair. If the flanking troops made a junction his force would be lost and the revolution probably fail, for nothing then would stop the government troops from sweeping to the unprepared lines of General Chamorro.

When the situation of the revolutionists was most hopeless there was a quick movement amongst the Americans. Conrad with his artillery and Gordon with his sharpshooters faced about. "Retreat!" cried Conrad. "Retreat!" We'll hold the enemy in check.

Conrad's machine gun opened fire on the government troops, who were making a victory winning charge to trap Mena's men. Down went the men in dozens before the deadly spit of the Maxim, and the rapid fire of the Remington autoloading. For a while the daring of the Americans staggered the Nicaraguan troops, whose general knowing that a serious check meant failure to his advance concentrated his attack on Conrad and his companions. The government machine guns opened fire on him. For one hour he stood in a hail of bullets until every helper at the gun fell dead or wounded. The government bugle blew the charge. A moment later hundreds of men rushed towards the smoking Maxim. Conrad jumped behind the gun and served it himself, driving back the battle-mad Nicaraguans with a hail of death.

At last Conrad's luck deserted him. A bullet passed under his gun and through his body. He fell. The enemy again tried to rush the gun. Crying bleeding and faint to the ammunition Conrad once more served the gun and the enemy fell back. "Viva Estrada!" "Viva Chamorro!" cried Conrad as the ammunition gave out and he fell to the earth unconscious.

General Gordon, with some of his men, rushed in and seized Conrad's body, and also carried the gun off the field as the sharpshooters kept the government troops back.

Conrad soon revived and he followed the retreating army, riding on a mule, on which he was held by the war correspondents who had followed the campaign, whilst Gordon's sharpshooters formed a guard around him. Conrad suffered agony from his wound, but the only sound that came from him was thanks to the gallant men who stood by him in his terrible time of need, and saved him from falling into the hands of Zelaya's men, which meant death.

Gabriel Conrad's gallantry kept back the enemy and made Mena's army's retreat possible, thus saving the unprepared forces of General Chamorro from what would have been a disastrous battle. A big order for one man.

While Conrad lay between life and death in Bluefields, a letter addressed to General Gabriel Conrad, from General Estrada arrived, which thanked the young American for his gallantry, and told him that he won his title at the battle of Santa Clara Mountain, where one man in every four was killed.

Copyright, 1910, by Metropolitan News-Paper Syndicate.